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ABSTRACT

This booklet explains Head Start's vision for parent involvement and discusses strategies that can be used to involve parents in the preparation of children for entry into Head Start, for participation in the program, and for the transition to school. The booklet notes that the challenge for programs is to work with each individual parent in ways that will build upon strengths and interests and to help support the family in the challenges that it faces. Using a question-strategies format, the booklet covers the critical areas for which Head Start staff must plan: (1) program development; (2) recruitment and enrollment; (3) orientation; (4) screening and assessment; (5) child and family development; (6) personal development; (7) shared decision-making; (8) family advocacy; and (9) community advocacy. Relevant performance standards are also listed for each of these areas. (MDM)

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HEAD START PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Vision, Opportunities and Strategies

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HEAD START PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Vision, Opportunities and Strategies

As a cornerstone of Head Start, parent involvement has contributed to the program's success in ways that remain unique to Head Start. Families across the country speak proudly of their involvement in Head Start and the impact that it has had in their lives and in their children's lives. Recently, however, many programs have been faced with new challenges that have made it difficult to involve parents in significant and meaningful ways. The more traditional approaches to parent involvement such as volunteering in the classroom and shared decision-making through policy councils are reaching only a small number of parents.

As Head Start approaches the 21st century with many challenges facing families, new strategies for parent involvement that provide parents with more varied, relevant opportunities for participation across all components of the program are needed. These strategies need to be developed in the context of the vision for parent involvement within Head Start.

THE HEAD START VISION FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Head Start's vision for parent involvement is to create and sustain an environment of partnership and collaboration across all elements of the Head Start program which:

- **supports parents as primary educators, nurturers and advocates;**
- **assures that every parent has an opportunity for a significant experience in Head Start; and,**
- **assures the policy making role of parents which is the foundation of Head Start's unique success.**

The challenge for programs is to work with each individual parent in ways that will build upon strengths and interests and to help support the family in the challenges that it faces. Fulfilling this vision requires leadership and creativity and an approach that recognizes parent involvement as the responsibility of all members of the Head Start team. Building partnerships with parents, or parent involvement, then, becomes **everyone's** responsibility within the program.

To ensure that this mutual responsibility for parent involvement is met, Head Start programs must pay careful attention to establishing and sustaining a relationship with families which has mutual expectations for support. Each phase of the families' experience in Head Start must be carefully addressed including planning and preparing for the family's entry into Head Start, developing and sustaining opportunities for participation during the Head Start year, and preparing for the family's transition out of Head Start.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION FOR ENTRY INTO HEAD START

First impressions and early contacts create an image of Head Start that will greatly influence a parent's decision to fully participate in the opportunities and experiences that Head Start offers. Sensitivity to the varying individual stresses, cultural issues, and the community surroundings of each family contributes to forging a meaningful partnership. Planning and preparation for these early experiences will significantly enhance and convey such sensitivities. The critical areas for which Head Start staff must plan and prepare include program development and management, recruitment and enrollment, orientation, and screening and assessment.

Program Development and Management

Head Start must be constantly ready to adapt the Head Start experience to evolving community and family needs. The management team must work closely together to assess barriers to achieving full parent participation, promote the integration of components into a comprehensive family approach and assure that all family activities reinforce the concept that parent involvement is everyone's responsibility.

Relevant Performance Standards:

- Assure that the entire Head Start staff share responsibility for involving parents in the program. [1304.5-4(c)]
- Assure that staff and program resources are reflective of the racial and ethnic population of the children in the program. [1304.2-2(c)(2)]
- Provide opportunities for the direct involvement of parents in decision making in program planning and operations. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]
- Provide opportunities for parents to work with their own children in cooperation with Head Start staff. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]
- Provide a two-way communication system between staff and parents that is part of an ongoing process of sharing information about the program and its services. [1304.5-4(a)]
- Provide opportunities for parent participation in the classroom and other program activities as paid employees, volunteers and observers. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]
- Provide opportunities for parent activities which parents have helped to develop. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]

Question: How can administrators and coordinators reinforce the parent involvement philosophy through program development and management?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Inform parents about Performance Standards and guidance and review them throughout the planning and participation stages to ensure that standards are being met.
- Reinforce the shared decision-making responsibilities of staff, administrators, board members and parents through substantive training of staff and parents on their roles and responsibilities as specified in the parent involvement Performance Standards, particularly I-30, 70.2 (The Parents).
- Emphasize and **demonstrate** the Head Start program's philosophy about parent involvement, including the importance of the partnership concept in pre-service and in-service staff training.
- Address and reinforce the responsibilities of all staff in the effort to involve parents through component integration training.
- Provide training on effective communication strategies and skills for both staff and parents.
- Develop plans and schedules for training parents and staff.
- Assure that communication systems and strategies provide parents with mechanisms they can use to express their interests, needs, and concerns across all components of the Head Start program (i.e., working with staff to plan events, component activities, training, demonstration projects).
- Develop a management information system for tracking parent involvement which can be incorporated into other information collection procedures for tracking across all components of Head Start to assess how well parent involvement strategies are working.
- Utilize parents as consumers in the process of conducting self-assessments of the program.
- Maintain adequate staffing ratios and hiring practices such as hiring parents and bilingual and culturally sensitive staff as well as male staff and other specific populations so that staff are representative of the families in the program.
- Reflect a management level commitment to the parent involvement philosophy by hiring Head Start parents, involving parents in the hiring process, and ensuring that prospective employees have a firm understanding and commitment to the philosophy.

Question: How can barriers to the involvement of parents be minimized and addressed so that each parent has the greatest opportunity for involvement?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Provide transportation and child care to increase accessibility to the program for parents.
- Provide opportunities for parents to eat meals with their children at the center.
- Develop strategies that will help increase safety and security at Head Start programs and events.
- Arrange staffing patterns to allow for more flexibility and availability to parents during evening hours and weekends.

- Assure that programs and services are provided in a culturally sensitive and competent manner so that the Head Start staff and parents together create an environment that is based on mutual respect and appreciation.
- Increase accessibility to programs for persons of all ages with disabilities including persons who are hearing impaired by providing ramps, sign language interpreters, etc.
- Reduce language barriers between parents and Head Start staff by developing strategies to prepare parents who speak different languages for the public school system and the lack of translation services available in many school systems, and by assisting families who speak different languages with accessing ESL classes and other services within Head Start and the community.
- Review information regarding the community from the community needs assessment to identify and discuss Head Start service needs, issues and cultural considerations. From a discussion of the community needs assessment information, parents and staff can move towards identifying the needs of the broader community and develop strategies for addressing these needs through advocacy, coordination, collaboration and action (i.e., neighborhood clean-up drive, neighborhood watch programs, school and/or park restoration, etc.).
- Provide a well equipped and accessible Parent Activity Room or Lounge with a library, television, video-tape equipment, comfortable furniture, bulletin board, etc.
- Develop staff capability to work individually with parents to assist them with any personal issues that might impede their ability to participate.
- Consider the use of the Home-based option, home visits and other at-home strategies to support and reinforce parents in their role as primary educators since this role takes place largely at home.

Recruitment and Enrollment

Recruitment and enrollment provides an opportunity to introduce parents to the uniqueness of Head Start and to convey information about how staff and parents will work together to achieve goals for themselves and their children. It is an especially important opportunity to reach out to parents who want to help their children and to show support and interest in their parental roles as primary educators, nurturers, and advocates for their children.

Question: How can the recruitment and enrollment period serve to more effectively stimulate parents' interest in the Head Start program?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Train staff in all aspects of recruiting including how to: enhance their communication skills; relate positively to parents and other family members; and, demonstrate warmth, receptivity, acceptance and responsiveness when interacting with parents.

- Emphasize the important role that parents have as primary educators for their children and how Head Start will work with them in this important role as they help their children grow and learn.
- Provide a list of program activities parents may select from when staff visit their homes and describe various opportunities such as employment and CDA credentialing in marketing efforts.
- Train second year and former parents as recruiters.
- Attend or speak at community meetings and activities together with parents to actively model the partnership approach and provide opportunities for the community to hear from the parents.
- Utilize marketing approaches and recruitment techniques which are sensitive to specific populations (i.e., various ethnic and cultural groups, parents with disabilities, male parents and other family members, migrant families, homeless parents, teen parents, grandparents, urban and rural populations, etc.).
- Utilize volunteer groups to canvas neighborhoods to help locate eligible families.
- Emphasize the necessity for personal contacts with parents during the recruitment and enrollment period and encourage staff to not rely too heavily on telephone contacts.
- Assist parents with completing applications when necessary.
- Use multi-media approaches to acquaint potential parents with the Head Start program during the recruitment and enrollment period (i.e., radio, TV spot announcements, posters placed in public places, etc.)
- Develop communication products that emphasize the involved role, commitment, and partnership of parents in the Head Start program and the benefits that their participation in the program can bring them and their child.
- Hold open houses for the community to see the program and increase their understanding of the program.

Orientation

Orientation and other early meetings set the tone for parent involvement and enhance parents' interest in participation. It is a critical time for welcoming parents, sharing information and facilitating the informal support networks that will build the partnership relationship. It is also a time to immediately engage parents in Head Start program activities while their interest and energy are high. Careful attention to the orientation content and strategies can play a critical role in determining a parent's long term response to the program.

Question: How can the program orientation process generate parents' enthusiasm and interest in the Head Start program, and encourage parent involvement?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Utilize orientation as a primary opportunity for a clear statement of the parent involvement philosophy of Head Start and the integral role that parents play in the success of the program and in their child's development.
- Utilize second-year and former parents as partners in the orientation of new parents. These parents should be representative of the community by including members of different language and ethnic groups as well as parents of children with disabilities. Second-year and former parents can, then, share examples that demonstrate how they have actively participated in their role as primary educators, advocates, and caregivers across all components of the program.
- Hold pre- or post-informal gatherings with staff and second-year parents to welcome new parents.
- Discuss potential activities that parents would like to work with staff to coordinate.
- Engage parents in a brief introductory orientation about the program during the summer months prior to the program's opening in September and then, follow up with more intensive, creative, and information filled orientations over a period of time using a variety of communication strategies such as audio-visual aides, games, and social events. By carrying out orientations over a period of time, the necessary information and material can be comprehensively covered without overburdening or overwhelming new parents.
- Give orientation sessions more than once to accommodate 1) parents who become involved after the first of the year, and 2) parents who may not be able to attend the first session due to work, training programs, education or other scheduling conflicts.
- Assist parents in deciding upon one parent activity during the orientation to be held shortly after the orientation. This short follow-up strategy can assist in carrying the momentum that was established at orientation into the program year.

Screening and Assessment

Screening and assessment can be a very critical time for parents and children as they face what is still a new environment. Parents are asked to share their vulnerabilities by responding to personal questions and to take risks by exposing their individual needs and interests. A hasty or insensitive approach may drive parents away.

It is a time for parents to work together with staff to determine a logical, supportive plan and establish goals and objectives for themselves and their children. This initial process can help parents to gain a sense of ownership and commitment to the Head Start experience for which they are striving.

Screening and assessment is also the first opportunity for parents to work together with staff in meeting the needs of their children by seeking and improving access to community services. Thus, it becomes a foundation for building skills and interests necessary for transitioning out of Head Start and into the larger community.

Relevant Performance Standards:

- Provide parents with experiences in child growth and development which will strengthen their role as the primary influence in their child's life. [1304.5-3(b)]
- Involve parents in health, mental health, dental and nutrition education. [1304.5-3(d)]
- Identify family and community resources to meet the basic life support needs of the family. [1304.5-3(e)]
- Involve parents in meetings with Head Start teachers and other staff to discuss and assess their children's individual needs and progress. {1304.5-3(g)]
- Assist the family in its own efforts to improve the condition and quality of family life. [1304.4-1]
- Furnish information about available community resources and how to use them. [1304.4-2(a)(5)]

Question: How can parents' strengths, needs and interests be effectively identified and built upon in the screening and assessment process?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Develop individualized family plans with the parents, using an ongoing family needs assessment process, to establish a working document from which parents can maximize their participation and experiences in Head Start both in the parent-child relationship and as individuals seeking personal development.
- Train parents to establish or access information and referral systems within the community.
- Provide parents with relevant information about health, mental health, disabilities services and nutrition so that they can be better prepared to determine both the necessity and quality of screening and assessments for their families, and develop strategies which encourage parents to see themselves as the primary authority with an integral, interactive role in the screening and assessment process (i.e., in the FNA's, IEP's, health screenings, etc.).
- Work with parents to build an understanding of child growth and development and how this development effects learning so that parents can recognize their children's developmental levels, set realistic expectations, and use more effective teaching strategies at home with their children.

PARTICIPATION IN HEAD START

Once parents become more comfortable with Head Start, they may be more open to selecting ways to participate. As the program progresses, Head Start must assure that every parent has the opportunity to participate in a way that is meaningful to them. Special opportunities must be available for each parent that build upon individual strengths to successfully meet personal and family objectives.

To provide such diverse opportunities for every parent, Head Start must take time to know parents, be creative, and look at every aspect of participation including child and family development, personal development, and shared-decision making.

Child and Family Development

Most parents come to Head Start because they want to do something good for their children. Head Start needs to support each parent in the roles of primary educator, caregiver and nurturer. This motivation to improve the lives of their children is a critical strength that can be built upon to provide meaningful experiences for each family.

Relevant Performance Standards:

- Provide opportunities for parents to participate in the classroom and other program activities as paid employees, volunteers and observers. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]
- Provide opportunities for parents to work with their own children in cooperation with Head Start staff. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]
- Involve parents in educational activities of the program to enhance their role as the primary influence in their child's education and development. [1304.5-1(a)]
- Identify and reinforce experiences which occur in the home that parents can utilize as educational activities for their children. [1304.2-1(e)]
- Assist parents in understanding and using alternative ways to foster learning and development of their children. [1304.2-2(a)]
- Include parents in curriculum development and have them as resources. [1304.2-2(c)(3)]
- Enhance parents' knowledge and understanding of the educational and developmental needs and activities of children by:
  - parent participation in planning the education program, and in center, classroom and home based activities;
  - parent training in activities that can be used in the home to reinforce learning and development of their children in the center;
  - parent training in the observation, growth and development of their children in the home environment and in identification of and handling special developmental needs;

continued

- participation of staff in staff-parent conferences and home visits; parent training focusing on child development and behavioral developmental problems of pre-school children. [1304.2-2(e)(1-5)]

► Provide parents information about all available health resources. [1304.3-6(a)(1)]

► Encourage parents to become involved in their child's health care and to accompany their child to health appointments. [1304.3-6(a)(2)]

► Involve parents in planning and implementing individual mental health needs of their children. [1304.3-8(b)(8)]

► Help parent groups work with other neighborhood and community groups with similar concerns. [1304.4-2(b)(1)]

► Involve parents in health, mental health, dental and nutrition education. [1304.5-3(d)]

Question: How can Head Start, overall, and through the various program components and options, assist parents in building on their parenting strengths and enhance their capacities to advocate for their families?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Assist parents to participate in the Head Start program as interactive, collaborative members of the Head Start team through volunteering, observing, visiting, working as a paid staff member, or as a member of the policy council to strengthen their parenting and advocacy skills.
- Provide parents with meaningful volunteer experiences throughout the program such as in the classroom, in the office and as transportation aides, etc.
- Provide a variety of options for parents to participate in formal and informal parenting education activities within the program and in other community locations.
- Demonstrate teaching strategies for parents that they could use at home in their role as primary educator and provide role modeling and mentoring in the area of advocacy including purposeful training of parents to advocate for themselves as a group.
- Utilize home visits to discuss a child's progress at the center and the ways in which the parent can work with the child and Head Start to build on these strengths such as child development principles and ideas to use with the child and other siblings.
- Ensure that parents serve on the various sub-committees and advisory committees such as education, health, mental health, disabilities and social services so as to develop the Head Start program in a way that is responsive to their child's needs and others.
- Involve parents in the program's curriculum development including asking parents to share knowledge about their children and their personal experiences as primary educators.
- Ensure that parents participate in health screenings and follow-ups with their children.
- Assist parents in identifying the mental health needs of the family and participate in any services that may be needed.

- Work with parents who have children with disabilities to identify and access community services as well as to identify developmentally appropriate activities that parents can do at home with the children.
- Encourage parents to participate in the area of nutrition by providing family recipes, cultural dishes, assistance in cooking, etc.

Personal Development

Efforts by Head Start to support parents in setting and achieving personal goals strengthen the opportunities for the family and, therefore, the child. Parent involvement can provide numerous opportunities for this personal growth and can help parents to develop important social support networks that assist them in fulfilling their roles as protectors and providers.

Relevant Performance Standards:

- ► Provide opportunities for the direct involvement of parents in decision making in program planning and operations. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]
- ► Involve parents in experiences and activities which lead to enhancing the development of their skills, self-confidence, and sense of independence in fostering an environment in which their children can develop to their full potential. [1304.5-3(a)]
- ► Involve parents in health, mental health, dental and nutrition education. [1304.5-3(d)]
- ► Involve parents in the identification of opportunities for continuing education which may lead towards self-enrichment and employment. [1304.5-3(f)]

Question: How can Head Start, overall, and through the various program components and options, specifically assist parents in building on their strengths, needs and interests with their own personal development?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Assist parents in accessing necessary services to reinforce their role as economic provider and role model for their children.
- Develop and strengthen strategies to involve and support parents in services offered such as literacy, substance abuse services, G.E.D., etc.
- Work with parents to create an environment that encourages social support and healthy lifestyles such as social events, cultural celebrations and parent initiated activities.
- Utilize parent recognition activities and strategies to support and reinforce parents who actively participate and to encourage other parents to become involved.
- Provide personal management and wellness programs to both parents and staff to assist them in maintaining healthy lifestyles such as time management, stress management, conflict resolution, weight management, etc.

- Ensure that parents participate in the management of Head Start through the center or classroom committees, policy councils and committees, development of new programs, grant writing, coordination with other community programs in order to gain skills and promote their needs and interests within Head Start.

Question: How can Head Start increase the opportunities for participation in the Head Start program and provide support for parents who are working or involved in education, employment training or job readiness activities?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Increase understanding of available funding options such as wrap around services and extended care and develop ways to access these options for Head Start families.
- Identify staff to serve as knowledgeable liaisons with job training programs and employment services in the community.
- Develop plans for incorporating working parents into the program development aspects of the program to ensure that the program is relevant to their needs.
- Be sensitive to the availability of parents who are working or in training when setting up appointments, home visits, and program activities or other events, and make adjustments in scheduling to accommodate the needs of working parents and provide more flexible hours.
- Provide additional support to these parents by planning special events such as family suppers and offering support groups for working parents.
- Expand the opportunities for parents to be involved off-site such as providing peer support and guidance to other parents, hosting support groups, organizing letter writing campaigns or phone-trees, social events, and cultural celebrations so that parents have more flexible opportunities to connect with the Head Start program and the other families within it.

Shared Decision-Making

The effective practice of shared decision-making demonstrates the true partnership between Head Start staff and parents that forms a sense of community with the Head Start program (ie. the "Head Start family"). While Policy Councils and Center Committees provide critical formal structures for decision-making, opportunities for making decisions which influence the philosophy, values, activities and operation of Head Start exist in all aspects of the program. Head Start programs should also explore these broader areas to include opportunities for influencing program outcomes, learning advocacy skills, and participating in community-based activities.

Relevant Performance Standards:

- Involve parents in educational activities of the program to enhance their role as the primary influence in their child's education and development. [1304.2-1(c)]
- Include parents in curriculum development and utilize them as resources. [1304.2-2(c)(3)]
- Provide for the creation of a Health Services Advisory Committee which shall consist of Head Start parents and health services providers in the community and other health specialists. [1304.3-2]
- Provide opportunities for parent participation in the direct involvement in decision-making in program planning and operations. [1304.5-1(c) and 70.2]
- Provide a two-way communication system between staff and parents that is part of an on-going process of sharing information about the program and its services. [1304.5-4(a)]
- Provide information to policy groups on a regular basis to enable them to make informed decisions in a timely and effective manner. [1304.5-4(b)]

Question: How can Head Start increase the opportunities for parents to participate in making decisions about the Head Start program and about issues that influence the lives of their children and families?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Assist parents in developing classroom activities.
- Seek parent input in the development of cultural celebrations and social events or activities.
- Ensure that parents participate on center, classroom, and policy councils or committees in ways that provide opportunities for utilizing their perspectives and which provide relevant experiences for them.
- Implement effective training strategies for the policy councils and committees to ensure that parents are knowledgeable and informed about this process, as well as about their roles and responsibilities while serving on these policy groups and work with policy councils and committees to provide parents with the necessary information, technical assistance and time to make informed decisions.
- Assist parents in developing creative and fiscally responsible uses for parent activity funds.
- Work with parents to form parent activity committees to plan and organize family activities within the program and in the community. The parent activity committee could also be involved in the community needs assessment process as well as assisting in providing parent recognition and celebrations for accomplishments, etc.

Question: How can the parent involvement coordinator, other staff and the director reinforce and support the role and responsibilities of the policy councils and committees?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Train policy council and committee parents in effective meetings procedures and board governance and functioning.
- Assure that policy councils and committees have a suitable place to meet on a regular basis and that appropriate refreshments are provided.
- Appear punctually when invited to policy council and committee meetings and offer whatever support is deemed necessary by the policy councils and committees.
- Assist in facilitating positive relations between the policy council and the Board of Directors in part by clarifying roles and responsibilities of each.
- Establish a well-defined impasse policy.
- Establish clear guidance on the use and accountability of funds raised by policy council and parent groups.
- Assist policy council parents with establishing a mechanism for reporting the highlights of their policy council meetings to the other parents in their centers and classrooms. Grantees can encourage such reporting on a routine basis by providing the communication vehicles such as newsletters, bulletins, information displays, etc.
- Provide support and encouragement to parents when invited to attend a policy council meeting and respect the role of the council by trying to avoid dominating the discussions.
- Support and assist parents in calling policy council meetings, setting the agendas and developing topics for discussion.
- Provide policy council members with appropriate written documentation about the program (i.e., copies of the previous refunding application, copies of quarterly or monthly financial reports, copies of the agency's personnel practices for the Head Start program, notices of staff vacancies, position descriptions of all Head Start staff, and copies of all policy statements).
- Assure that policy council parents serve on sub committees of the council, including the personnel committee, and that parents are involved in preparing the program's refunding application.
- Work with policy councils and committees to provide parents with the necessary information, technical assistance and time to make informed decisions (i.e., disseminating information in a timely and non-technical manner).
- Work with parents to develop a time-line schedule for policy decisions and planning issues as well as the dissemination of necessary information for making them.
- Develop a schedule for policy council training.
- Assure that the policy council meets at a time that is convenient to most policy group members giving specific consideration to the schedules of working parents or parents in education and employment training.

TRANSITIONING OUT OF HEAD START

Head Start offers an intensive and supportive environment to safely identify and address personal and family goals, practice skills, and develop a knowledge base from which to move out of Head Start into the larger community. Crystallizing these interests and skills, tying parents into new community structures, and preparing the community for participation by Head Start families are all critical parent involvement responsibilities. Head Start must create the bridges to community organizations and networks that will help families sustain the motivation and success that was achieved within Head Start.

Family Advocacy

Head Start has been committed to working with families to sustain the skills and development that have been achieved during the Head Start program. To sustain these growths, Head Start must work with parents to build knowledge and skills about systems and services so that they can confidently advocate for their families' needs beyond Head Start—in the schools, in the health systems, in the social service systems, and in the community.

Relevant Performance Standards:

- Provide families with the necessary skills and insight to link the family to an ongoing health care system to ensure that the child continues to receive comprehensive health care after leaving Head Start. [1304.3-1(c)]
- Communicate to other community agencies the needs of Head Start families and ways to meet their needs. [1304.4-2(b)(2)]
- Involve parents in the identification and use of family and community resources to meet the basic life support needs of the family. [1304.5-3(e)]
- Enable parents to influence the character of programs affecting their interests. [1304.5-5(1)]
- Provide technical and other support needed to enable parents to secure on their own behalf assistance available from public and private sources. [1304.5-5(3)]

Question: How can Head Start assist parents in maximizing their strengths and negotiating systems within their community that will meet their family needs and interests?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Encourage parents to participate in community service activities to acquire needed skills, build on occupational interests, expand support networks, and learn to access the opportunities themselves in their community.
- Assist parents in working with community service providers of related social services to help make their services more relevant and appropriate for the Head Start families.

- Train and support parents in advocating for their needs and their children's needs with other community service providers and systems (e.g. accessing disabilities services for their children).
- Train and support parents in community organizing and political action to advocate for their needs and interests.
- Involve parents in the development of community linkages for Head Start as well as in coordination and collaboration efforts through grant writing, proposal development, serving on committees, and as spokespersons, etc.
- Support and encourage parents to take similar roles and advocacy approaches into the public school system as their children transition into kindergarten and from kindergarten to first grade.
- Formalize a transition plan and continue to provide a supportive environment for parents during the transition out of the program.
- Work with the community to organize events such as community service fairs, holiday campaigns, and booths at fairs that promote healthy lifestyles in the community.

Community Advocacy

Head Start is committed to being a partner in the development of communities that are responsive to Head Start families and children. This objective is accomplished by providing opportunities for community exchange and by supporting and encouraging parents to participate in community networks and activities.

Relevant Performance Standards:

- ► Help Head Start parents work with other neighborhood and community groups with similar concerns. [1304.4-2(b)(1)]
- ► Communicate to other community agencies the needs of Head Start families and ways of meeting these needs. [1304.4-2(b)(2)]
- ► Help assure better coordination, cooperation and information sharing with community agencies. [1304.4-2(b)(3)]
- ► Call attention to inadequacies of existing community services or the need for additional services and assist in improving those available services or bringing new services to the community. [1304.4-2(b)(4)]

Question: How can Head Start assist parents in working with the community to improve the lives of other people in their community?

The following are some suggested strategies:

- Support parents in taking on community projects (i.e., neighborhood clean-ups, park restoration, etc.) by providing information on organizing techniques, assisting them with organizing, and providing parents access to the facility and equipment.

- Support and encourage parents to take similar roles and advocacy approaches into the public school system as their children transition into kindergarten and from kindergarten to first grade.
- Involve parents in the development of community linkages for Head Start as well as in coordination and collaboration efforts through grant writing, proposal development, serving on committees and as spokespersons, etc.
- Encourage parents to participate in community service activities to fill needs within the community.
- Support parents' community involvement by taking parents with staff to community meetings and by going with parents to community activities.
- Train and support parents in community organizing and political action to advocate for their needs and interests both individually and collectively for the needs of all.
- Work with parents to organize family activities **for** the whole community or **with** the community such as a baseball team, a community picnic, or a cultural celebration.
- Participate in community events such as hosting a booth at the local fair, participating in holiday celebrations and parades.
- Advocate for and with the community to promote and strengthen community building and healthy lifestyles. Examples include organizing neighborhood or park clean ups, neighborhood watch programs, red ribbon campaigns, family-oriented holiday alternatives, health or community service fairs, and letter-writing campaigns.

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